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PARIS FOR WALLER; LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/2015
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: SARG COMPLAINTS ABOUT SYRIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON
PHONE/FAX PROBLEMS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael Corbin, per 1.4 b,d.

11. (C) FM Mu'allim's chef de cabinet Bassam Sabbagh met Charge October 31 to complain that Syrian Ambassador to the U.S. Imad Mustafa has problems sending faxes and making phone calls to the MFA here from both the Syrian chancery and his residence. Sabbagh said Mustafa had called the Minister to reiterate his previous complaints on telephone and fax problems. Mustafa claimed he was now forced to send faxes "from the local Kinko's branch." Sabbagh said that unnamed U.S. commercial telephone operators had categorically stated that "there were no problems with the lines" and that the phones and faxes should function normally. Sabbagh said the MFA viewed this as very unfortunate and underlined that he did not believe the U.S. Embassy in Damascus had problems with its phones. Charge responded that the Embassy often had problems with its phone connections and that we believed that previous complaints about phones and fax lines at the Syrian Embassy had been resolved in Washington.

12. (C) Comment: This is not the first time the SARG has raised this issue. The MFA raised it with the previous Charge about four months ago. We understand the issue has also been raised in Washington. Given our string of demands to the MFA on Embassy security here since the September 12 attack, the Sabbagh approach may simply be the MFA seeking to balance the flow of requests. However, while the image of Syrian diplomats scurrying to Kinko's to send sensitive faxes to Damascus is amusing, we do have enormous phone problems here and are currently going through the break-in period of an updated system which holds the promise of resolving some of our issues. This system relies on cable connections to the local PTT and computer settings in the local switch that we have obtained through painstaking personal contact work. We are very vulnerable to any SARG decision to take action against our phones on some claimed "reciprocal" basis. End comment.
CORBIN